

AMITABHA AND AVALOKITEŚVARA IN AN INSCRIBED
GANDHARAN SCULPTURE

Many years ago I received from Professor Charles Kieffer a photograph of the inscribed sculpture which is the subject of this paper. It was found by Professor Kieffer in Taxila in August 1961 in the possession of a private individual, and he was able to obtain a single photograph, which is the original of the plate reproduced here. On his return to Taxila a month later, the sculpture had disappeared, and no information about its whereabouts was forthcoming. We are, therefore, dependent entirely upon this one photograph. I must express my sincere gratitude to Professor Kieffer for his kind permission to publish the piece, and at the same time my regrets for so lengthy a delay. This delay, I should say in extenuation, has been due not only to pressure of other work, but also to some hesitation on my part about the inscription, which appeared to show unambiguously Mahāyāna names, and I hesitated to publish prematurely, in case some alternative reading might suggest itself. However, the inscription is clear enough, and I feel now that I must make it available to colleagues, and give to others the chance of agreeing or of proposing some other reading.

The piece is clearly a fragment of a sculpture which originally consisted of three figures, of which that to the right of the central Buddha has been lost, together with (presumably) about one-third of the inscription, or possibly slightly more. The figure on the Buddha's left must be Avalokiteśvara. The identification is already clear from the lotus which he holds, and the high crest on his headdress, which must contain the small Buddha-figure typical of this Bodhisattva. The fact that this feature is not clear in the photograph — due to the shadow — is unfortunate, but its presence need not be doubted. In a sculpture published by Dr. J. C. Harle¹ a standing Avalokiteśvara shows the Tathāgata-figure

1. *A hitherto unknown dated sculpture from Gandhāra*, in « South Asian Archaeology », Leyden, 1974, pp. 128-35, plate 71.

undoubtedly present, within a headdress comparable to the one here. As Dr. Harle notes, this was the first example known from Gandhāra of this attribute of Avalokiteśvara, which later became so frequent a feature; and the present sculpture provides a further example. Here the figure is seated, and the positioning of the hands and feet is frequent for Avalokiteśvara; and the identification is put beyond doubt by the occurrence of a form of his name in the inscription.

It would be reasonable to expect that the missing figure on the other side of the Buddha was also a Bodhisattva. Such groups of three are not unduly rare, and it has been traditional in modern times to designate them as representations of the «Miracle of Śrāvastī», although not all scholars have accepted this identification for every such triad. The culmination of this miraculous sequence was the descent of the Buddha from the Trāyastriṃśat heaven, accompanied by Indra and Brahmā. Later, it has been held, we have the same scene represented, but with Indra replaced by Avalokiteśvara, and Brahmā by Maitreya. But, so far as I know, no-one has suggested that the central Buddha in the group was other than Śākyamuni. This is perhaps surprising, since in the Pāli texts the Bodhisatta Metteyya is known only as the Buddha of the future, and Avalokiteśvara is not even known to the Pāli tradition². It is virtually certain that Avalokiteśvara throughout his career was exclusively a Mahāyāna figure. It would then follow automatically that the central preaching Buddha in the group is Amitābha. This again is supported by the inscription.

If, however, the Buddha in the triad is Amitābha, then the literature strongly suggests that the missing Bodhisattva must have been Mahāsthānaprāpta. The principal texts have been collected by Marie-Thérèse de Mallmann in the first part of her monograph³; and a detailed account can be found in *Hōbōgirin*, s.v. *Amida*: see especially p. 29b for the «Triad of Amida».

Assuming that no more than a very small fragment has been lost from the right-hand side of the plinth, the inscription can be read:

budhamitrāsa olo'īspare danamukhe budhamitrāsa amridaha...

In *danamukhe* the character *mu* is mistakenly reversed. A few other examples are known.

2. At least, his name is not included in Malalasekera's *Dictionary of Pāli proper names*, nor in Akanuma Chizen's *Indo-Bukkyō koyū meishi jiten*, «Dictionary of Indian Buddhist proper names».

3. *Introduction à l'étude d'Avalokiteśvara*, Paris, 1948, p. 21 ff. The main sources are *Sukhāvatī-vyūha* (original in Max Müller's edition, 56; A. Ashikaga, 49); *Ami-tāyur-buddhānusmṛti-sūtra*, Chinese text in Taishō edition, vol. 12, no. 365. A further Sanskrit reference can now be added, *Karuṇāpundarīka*, ed. Isshi Yamada, London, 1968, vol. II, p. 114 ff.

In *amridaha* the attachment of the conjunct *-r* sign to the vowel stroke is not known to me elsewhere, but I can see no other interpretation.

The final character before the break is apparently an *alif* overwritten with a *ha*. At first sight, it is tempting to take the short stroke rising slantwise below the *da* as an *-e* attached to the vertical of the final character, and to read *amrida'e*. This is unlikely, because of the slight bulge to the left of the vertical, which makes it almost certain that the carver attempted to produce an approximation to a *ha* as a correction. A very similar shape appears in the manuscript of the *Gāndhārī Dharma-pāda* (Dhp.): see my edition, plate III, line 32 *ghahaṭhe'i*, corrected to *-ehi*, where a similar bulge belonging to the *h* shows on the vertical of the *alif*.

The inscription is of a somewhat unusual form, and it is difficult to give a certain translation of a short fragment like this, even although the words are correctly read. The most probable rendering seems to be:

« The Avalokeśvara of Buddhāmitra, a sacred gift, the Amṛtābha of Buddhāmitra... ».

The repetition of the donor's name is curious. It should be observed that the names of the Bodhisattva and the Buddha come immediately below the figures to which they refer, and it is possible that the two facts are connected.

The interpretation of the name Avalokiteśvara has been the subject of much discussion and speculation. I shall confine myself here to a few brief observations arising out of the present inscription. First, it is unlikely that the syllable *-it-* was omitted here accidentally. On the contrary, one might remark that the participial *avalokita-* has always been a difficulty to modern scholars. More important, the earliest Chinese transliteration, in the *Sukhāvati-vyūha*⁴, is *?āp-lu-siwan*, i.e., *avalok('a)svara*, which equally lacks the syllable *-it-*.

In the case of *olo'iśpara*, the first syllable would inevitably have been understood to represent *ava-* when the name was turned into Sanskrit. But if the *Gāndhārī* form here is older, then two alternative possibilities can be considered for the earlier history of the name.

It is well known that the *Rgveda* possesses the form *uloka* as well as *loka*, without difference of sense. The first of these, however, was lost quite early in the Brahmanical tradition. It was not recognised by the editors of the *Pada-pāṭha*, who everywhere separated the *u* as if it were the particle *u*, even though in many such places the particle would have no function. A fair number of Old Indo-Aryan words are not

4. Taishō, vol. 12, no. 361, pp. 228b, 290a. This is of the second century A.D., if the ascription to Lokakṣema is accepted, but in any case cannot be later than the third. For more details concerning the Chinese rendering of this name, see my article in the *W. B. Henning Memorial Volume*, p. 83.

attested in later Sanskrit texts, but must have continued to live in the spoken languages, since their descendants still exist in modern Indo-Aryan. It would, therefore, not be surprising if *uloka* remained in the North-West. The extant written materials are so scanty that a lack of attestation is no argument to the contrary. It is a feature of Gāndhārī that *o* is from time to time written in place of *u*: see DhP. p. 80, *aṇośe'a* (Skt. *anuśaya*), *hoda* (Skt. *huta*), and others. In *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum* ii.1, *Kharoṣṭhī Inscriptions*, ed. Sten Konow, plates XI.2 and XXIV.4 have *daṇamokho* and *danamokhe* respectively, clearly written, although Konow transcribed them both as *-mu-*, without sufficient justification. We may then see in *olo'ispara* a spelling for an earlier **Ulokeśvara*, hence equivalent to *Lokeśvara*. This is particularly tempting, in view of the frequent use in later centuries of the epithet *Lokeśvara* for various forms and manifestations of Avalokiteśvara.

Alternatively, we may take account of the occasional use in Gāndhārī writing of the vowel *o* in place of an etymological *ā*: DhP. p. 81, *monaso* (Skt. *mānaso*), *samokadu* (*samāgata-*), *gameṣiṇo* (*gaveṣiṇā*). The writing *olo'ispara* may then represent an earlier *Ālokeśvara* « Lord of Light ». This would then fit well with the Bodhisattva's association with *Amitābha* « Possessor of Limitless Light », and would agree approximately in sense with the etymology from Vedic *ava-ruc-* suggested by Renou and accepted by Mallmann, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

In the name of the Buddha *Amitābha/Amitāyuh*, the first part, if originally formed in Middle Indian, could naturally represent either Sanskrit *amita-* or *amṛta-*. The latter would seem to underlie the form in the present inscription, but elsewhere *Amita-* seems to be used exclusively. Nevertheless, the sense of « immortality » must have remained implicitly present, since the great dhāraṇī of the Buddha is that of the ten *amṛtas*: see *Hōbōgirin*, p. 28b: ... *om amṛte amṛtodbhave amṛtasāmbhave amṛtagarbhe*, etc.

There can be no doubt that the two names *Amitābha* and *Amitāyuh* represent the same Buddha, and a given text is not always consistent in using only one of the two forms. Naturally, the Sanskrit names, once formed, necessarily remained distinct. But if the Buddha first received his name in Gāndhārī, the vagaries of Kharoṣṭhī spelling allow the possibility that the two were originally the same — or rather, that the one developed from the other.

Thus, if the name originally ended in *-ābha*, this could appear in a succession of Kharoṣṭhī manuscripts as *-aha*, *-a'a*, with nominative singular in *-a'u*, *-ayu*, and the name could then be understood as equivalent to *Amitāyuh*. Some such process, or something similar in reverse order, could easily have taken place without the scribes having any idea or intention of altering the sense. The spelling variations which would permit such an evolution are noted in detail in DhP. introduction, pp. 90-93, §§ 37-39, and need not be set out in detail here. I must add that I put this forward as a possibility, and not as a proved conclusion.



The Gandhāran Sculpture.

It remains to propose a date for the sculpture, and in this matter I am not sufficiently qualified. I am indebted to Mrs. Rekha Morris for information about a work of Professor Dani on his excavations in the Chakdara region, on the basis of which he asserts that the type of Padmapāṇi in the posture of the present sculpture is not to be found before the fourth century A.D., and the inscriptions at this time are in Gupta Brāhmī script [as, one might add, would be expected]. For the Kharoṣṭhī of our monument, the fourth century is much too late, and I should conjecture that the writing is probably of the second century. I must stress that this is only a conjecture, and I leave it to others to propose a date on the basis of the stylistic characteristics of the sculpture.